

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 856

FL 020 476

AUTHOR Cyrus, Stanley A.; Legge, June M.
TITLE Afro-Hispanic Literature: Cultural and Literary Enrichment for the Foreign Language Classroom.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 13p.; In: Acting on Priorities: A Commitment to Excellence. Dimension: Languages '90. Report of Southern Conference on Language Teaching; see FL 020 470.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black History; *Black Literature; *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Pluralism; Ethnic Groups; *Literary History; Literature Appreciation; Novels; Reading Materials; Second Language Instruction; *Second Languages; *Spanish; Spanish Literature; *World Literature
IDENTIFIERS *Afro Hispanics

ABSTRACT

Millions of people of African descent in Spanish-speaking countries are commonly omitted from the cultural, literary, and linguistic content of Spanish classes. Afro-Spanish literature can be integrated into the Spanish curriculum from the first year. This literature is not easily defined, but does reflect and aid in understanding the black experience in Latin America. It has the important traits of: (1) romanticism, modernism, and negrism combined in a syncretic core; (2) advocacy and affirmation of the experience it reflects; (3) concern for fraternity transcending ethnic groups; (4) satirical tone; (5) emphasis on nature's beauty; (6) kinesthetic emphasis, as on dance; (7) romantic sentimentalism; and (8) rhythms, patterns, and other elements of African language. A chronological approach to the study of the literature enables the student to see developments over time as they affect black Latin Americans. The novel is a good source of outstanding Afro-Hispanic work; several are suggested. Incorporation of Afro-Hispanic literature into the Spanish curriculum can help provide both a more pluralistic outlook and better cultural understanding. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

AFRO-HISPANIC LITERATURE: CULTURAL AND LITERARY ENRICHMENT FOR THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Stanley A. Cyrus
Morehouse College

June M. Legge
Clayton State College

In foreign languages more than other disciplines, we realize the importance of teaching a world that is broad and multi-faceted, and which includes and represents with fairness all constituent groups. Yet millions of people who are of African descent in the Spanish-speaking countries may be omitted from the cultural, literary, and linguistic content of our Spanish classes if we do not take steps to fill in the cultural void. So, too, are students of Spanish in the United States denied access to the stylistic and cultural richness of the Afro-Hispanic world. The intent of this paper is to facilitate acquisition of information that foreign language faculty can use to include Afro-Hispanic literature and culture in Spanish classes in an integrated way from the first year through graduate school.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Flank
medley

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

ED348856

FL020476

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF AFRO-HISPANIC LITERATURE/CULTURE

Many teachers of Spanish might ask: "What is Afro-Hispanic literature? I have never heard of it." There has, through the years, been a great deal of discussion about what it is. Does one include, for example, novels like Gomez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841), Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdéz* (1839), or the anti-slavery novels such as *Francisco* (1839) of Suárez y Romero and *El negro Francisco* (1873) by Zambrana? All these novels treat favorably the black Latin American, seen usually in a slavery situation. Does Afro-Hispanic literature include the work of non-black poets such as Carpentier, Guirao, Ballagas and Pales Malos, Caribbean poets who were masters of using African-sounding words for musical and rhythmic effect? Most scholars would argue that these novels and poems are not authentic Afro-Hispanic literature for they lack the true black perspective. They view from the outside and, though well-meaning, too often fall prey to the apologetic and condescending attitude rightly opposed by black students and scholars.

What, then, constitutes Afro-Hispanic culture and literature? Definitions vary. Any attempt to arrive at a definition of black Latin American authors/literature cannot fail to take into account the term *mestizaje*, which is central to an understanding of the black experience in Latin America. *Mestizaje* means the blending of races, and many Latin American countries have insisted that the black, white and Indian races have blended perfectly into one. But for the black Latin American, it can mean several things: it can be a blending of races in which there is equal respect for all; or it can be seen as a means of absorbing or erasing

a minority culture considered to be an inferior culture by the majority culture.

Most of the authors designated as Afro-Hispanic have accepted their African origins, and some insist proudly on them, reaffirming that their blackness is worthy, that their accomplishments and the contributions they have made to the culture are significant, and that they resist absorption into another culture, even though that attempt may be presented as benign. The Afro-Hispanic writer rejects racism, and instead of trying to blend into the white aesthetic, is intent upon forging a black aesthetic, one which, while universal in its themes, retains the concerns of black Latin Americans and reflects the unique linguistic and cultural aspects of their society.

In reading Afro-Hispanic literature, one must keep in mind the unique setting in which the writers existed. From the beginning, the problems of white versus black aesthetics and publication difficulties existed (presses were controlled by the majority race). Popular literature and a primarily illiterate constituency, as well as constant social and economic pressures, are all part of the black writers' everyday concerns. During the slavery period, the very lack of freedom and lack of privilege to write were deterrents to production. The problem of peer pressure from other groups, ranging from whites to Indians and mulattoes, added then as now to a black writer's preoccupation.

PRINCIPAL TRAITS OF AFRO-HISPANIC LITERATURE

One very rewarding approach in the study of Afro-Hispanic literature can be the analysis of thematic

and stylistic features. The literature we are exploring can be said to contain the following important traits:

1. A syncretic core

Though in many ways Afro-Hispanic literature is different or unique, it is also composite, for in it features of many other schools converge to produce a syncretic core. The continuity and common elements, particularly between romanticism and modernism on the one hand and negrism on the other hand, offer rich, relatively untouched areas for study and research.

2. The re-affirmative spirit

An essential trait of Afro-Hispanic literature is the re-affirmative spirit. It is advocacy, a defiant zeal to substantiate and to continue what is considered as having been already established by ancestors. It is a tendency to reflect the dynamism, accomplishments and glorious traditions of an ethnic group which, though having been subjected and exploited, is nevertheless resolved to reassure its socio-cultural identity.

3. The universal fraternity

Another characteristic is universal fraternity---concern for transcending all ethnic groups, a concern which encompasses a broader humanity. The emphasis is on issues of social justice for the oppressed and poor of all races. The wide-spread biological *mestizaje* in Latin America has also helped to fill Afro-Hispanic literature with protagonists representative of many ethnic groups and

mixtures--an element rarely seen in other literatures. Of paramount importance is the noble quality of human empathy, and the desire for a just society.

4. The satirical tone

There is also in the literature an inclination to use ironic and derisive wit to attack or expose the injustices in society. Given the fact that the dominant theme of Afro-Hispanic literature is the harsh social and economic reality, the satirical tone, both in poetry and prose, seems an obvious corollary.

5. Nature

Another characteristic is the emphasis on nature's panoramic beauty, but in a more vital, animistic, and telluric sense. It should be noted that in Latin American countries, blacks were concentrated in particular pockets or regions, and were often obliged to reside in one or two provinces. The Afro-Ecuadorean writer, Adalberto Ortiz, apart from reflecting the geography of his native province, Esmeraldas, and portraying elements of nature as having a life of their own, has classified the intimate spiritual relationship of some blacks with nature as "almost sexual."

6. The kinesthetic emphasis

In Afro-Hispanic literature there is on occasion, a spiritual exaltation of black women. More frequently, the concentration is on the more voluptuous qualities, such as those of the dancer.

7. Romantic sentimentalism

This is the tendency to bare emotions and frustration in the face of harsh conditions.

8. The resonant pitch

Afro-Hispanic literature is replete with onomatopoeic rhythms, intensive phrasal patterns and sonorous African linguistic elements.

A CHRONOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE AUTHORS

After becoming aware of the main traits which distinguish Afro-Hispanic literature, many educators might want to explore the literature and culture using the chronological or historical approach. This view enables the student to see developments over time as they affect the black Latin American. Richard Jackson (1979) divides production of Afro-Hispanic literature into three periods:

Early Literature (1821-1921)

Major Period (1922-1949)

Contemporary Period (1950-present).

If one uses this approach, some account should first be taken of the folklore or oral literature. A good introduction to this can be found in the work of Lidia Cabrera, a Cuban who has published several different collections of tales, some of which she has enhanced, others which were transcribed more or less as heard. These collections are widely available.

Moving into slave narrative, Juan Francisco Manzano (1767-1854) wrote his *Autobiografía* which detailed his life as a slave. Plácido [Jose Manuel Valdés] (1767-1844), a free black Cuban, wrote poetry before his execution for plotting to free slaves and gain independence for Cuba.

Fitting chronologically into this period are Martín Morúa Delgado, of Cuba; Candelario Obeso of Colombia; and Panama's poet, Gaspar Octavio Hernández. Candelario Obeso, an emotional poet who eventually committed suicide, represents very well the last half of the nineteenth century, with his authentic language and scenes from his home town.

The major period from 1922 to 1949 saw the rise of Nicolás Guillén in Cuba, Adalberto Ortiz in Ecuador, and Arnoldo Palacios in Colombia. A chronological approach must include the work of Guillén, whose *Motivos de son* caused a great stir. Adalberto Ortiz's novels are very important also.

The contemporary period features Manuel Zapata Olivella of Colombia, Nelson Estupiñán Bass of Ecuador, Quince Duncan of Costa Rica, and Carlos Guillermo Wilson of Panama. Reading selections from these authors will give the reader insight into present-day attitudes and concerns of the black Latin-American.

THE AFRO-HISPANIC NOVEL

Anyone familiar with Afro-Hispanic literature will cite the novel as a key to understanding the evolution of black literature in Latin American. A suggested order for reading the outstanding novels might be the following:

1. *Matalaché* (Albújar, Peru, 1928). The story of a mulatto slave who falls in love with his master's daughter, this novel still reflects some stereotyping, as the protagonist is represented as a bifurcated personality with black features and white aspirations.

2. *Juyungo* (Ortiz, Ecuador, 1942). This novel, winner of the first prize as the best Ecuadorian novel in 1942, has a protagonist a black warrior who evolves from racial hatred to class struggle, from social problems to the fight against injustice.

3. *Las Estrellas son negras* (Palacios, Colombia, 1949). This realistic novel, depicting the vivid struggles of a family in the Choco region of Colombia, follows the protagonist through a 24-hour period as he comes to grips with his situation.

4. *Cumboto* (Díaz-Sánchez, Venezuela, 1950). This novel, chosen by the Ibero-American Novel Project of the William Faulkner Foundation as the most notable novel published in Ibero-American between 1945 and 1962, dramatizes *mestizaje* on a personal and symbolic level, combining it with a richly poetic rendition of folklore, sociology, and anthropology.

5. *Chambacú, Corral de negros* (Olivella, Colombia, 1963). An interesting family is followed as they struggle into the civil rights period, some succumbing to the street life around them, some rising to lead people to equality.

All these novels were chosen because of their importance and recognition as works of quality, not only in Afro-Hispanic literature, but also in Latin American

literature considered as a whole. The novels represent several different geographical regions, illustrating the particular regional characteristics of their origins. The forty-year span in production saw some of the most significant changes in social history, and will help the reader trace changes in the society over time.

CONCLUSION

One must bear in mind that literature is one of the major instruments in aiding students to develop a broader point of view and in promoting understanding of diverse cultures. Publications such as the *Journal of Higher Education* remind us of the shortage of foreign language teachers in general and of black ones in particular. At the same time, the foreign language curriculum and course content in many high schools, colleges and universities continue to highlight the conventional works of literature, while offering little reflection on the artistic output and the historical achievements of other groups. There is, therefore, an urgent need for a more pluralistic outlook, an urgent need to diversify--not only to attract more students, but also to achieve a greater understanding of the variegated Hispanic world.

Since in literature there are constantly shifting patterns, new elements and new schools, a fascinating approach can be a comparative one, which emphasizes the parallels existing between the various literary tendencies or movements. In this regard, the common elements between and among movements, such as Romanticism, Modernism and Negrism, would be particularly attractive and rewarding. Whatever approach we take, we must move together to diversify and enrich our offering, which, while enrich-

ing our students, will enhance our own understanding and appreciation for life as it is reflected in all its forms.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CRITICAL STUDIES ON LITERATURE

Jackson, Richard L. *Black Writers in Latin America*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1879.

Black Image in Latin American Literature. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976.

Johnson, Lenuel. *The Devil, the Gargoyle and the Buffoon: The Negro as Metaphor in Western Literature*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1969.

Lewis, Marvin A. *Afro-Hispanic Poetry, 1940-1980*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1983.

Young, Ann Venture. *The Image of Black women in 20th Century Southy American Poetry*. Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1987.

GENERAL REFERENCES

Degler, Carl N. *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States*. New York: MacMillan, 1971.

Fanon, Franz. *Black Skins, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

Rout, Leslie. *The African Experience in Latin America: 1502 to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Barnet, Miguel. *Biografía de un cimarrón*. Havana: Instituto de Etnología y Folklore, 1966

Barrios, Pilar. *Mis cantos*. Montevideo: Editorial Comité Amigos del Poeta, 1949.

Díaz Sánchez, Ramon. *Cumboto*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1967.

Díaz Sánchez, Ramón. *Cumboto*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1967.

Duncan, Quince. *Bronce*. San José, Costa Rica: Cuadernos de Arte Popular, 1970.

Estupiñán Bass, Nelson. *Canto Negro por la luz*. Esmeraldas, Ecuador: Ediciones del Núcleo Provincial de Esmeraldas de la Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1954.

Cuando los guayacanes. Quito: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1954.

Guillén, Nicolás. *Antología mayor*. Havana: Ediciones Unión, 1965.

López Albuja, Enrique. *Matalache*. Lima: Juan Mejía Baca and P. L. Villanueva, 1934.

Ortiz, Adalberto. *El animal herido*. Quito: Editorial Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1959.

Juyungo. Buenos Aires: Editorial Americalee, 1943.

Palacios, Arnoldo. *Las Estrellas son negras*. Bogotá: Editorial Revista Colombiana, 1971.

Zapata Olivella, Manuel. *Corral de negros*. Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1963.